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Interview with Linda Pisano

Linda Pisano

Abby Kennedy

Darleen Feldman

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Interview with Linda Pisano 3/2/99
(member of the Church of Latter Day Saints)
by Abby Kennedy and Darleen Feldman

DF: It's March 2nd and we're here interviewing Linda Pisano. I'm Darleen Feldman.

AK: I'm Abby Kennedy.

LP: Linda Pisano.

DF: To begin with, I'm just going to ask if you can tell us about yourself--where you grew up, where you've lived, how you ended up here.

LP: Okay. I grew up in Northern Utah. I actually grew up as a Catholic in Utah. I went right to college, so I did my first degree there and then I did my 2nd, my Master's degree. And got married, when I was 22. And yes, how old are you, 22? Paul is a few months older than me. We took off to Bloomington, Indiana and then transferred to the College Conservatory of Music in Cincinnati where we both started our post-graduate work. And then he stayed there, and then I was like, this program just isn't for me and I got an offer to be in a graduate program at Ohio State. So I went to school there. So for 3 years we lived in separate cities which was kind of challenging. And then after that I free lanced for a year. While we were in Bloomington we got a dog, so we had one dog. But our main place was Cincinnati, even though I had an apartment in Columbus. Then I free lanced for a year in the region, and then I took this job which is a 2 year position, which ends this May. And Paul is finishing his doctorate and he also teaches here, Italian and Music. And I actually joined the Church, which you're going to ask me about, I know, when we were in Bloomington, Indiana. And I had sort of known about it since the time of Utah, but I felt sort of a need to leave Utah because it's a very dominate religious area. So there are a lot of challenges there, culturally. So, I really had a challenging time there and so it wasn't until I was able to leave that culture that I was able to view the Church and the Doctrine on its own.

We were married again in the Temple, July 6th of 1993. Which is a different kind of marriage ceremony. We had been married in the Catholic church and then since we were both members, we went ahead and got married in the Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints or the "Mormon Church." The "Mormon Church" is a slang name. That was kind of a quick overview. But I grew up in a northern town, in Northern Utah, it was a small, rural community. So I was happy to live in Cincinnati for a while.

DF: This kind of follows what you were just saying, but if you could tell us about your involvement with the LDS Church, and maybe explain, if it's not too personal, why you decided to convert.

LP: Sure, no, that's fine. My involvement... I knew about the Church from a very young age, and my father, although my family was Catholic, as we were living in a town which was probably 98% Latter Day Saints, Mormons. It was very important to him that we learn about their religion

in order to live there. And he's very, sort of wise that way, about how to deal with things. There were challenges, of course, you know being sort of the outsider. But I knew about the Church. And then when I got into college I started to look around and wasn't settled in and so I had been looking into the Church. And when I met Paul, I was seriously looking into the Church. And that's one of the things that inspired our conversations. To get to know each other, is our communication, uh, Paul my husband [pointing to tape recorder] just so you know. Sort of inspired our early conversations. But I didn't feel comfortable joining. There was a lot of opposition from my family and friends who were not members of the Church. A lot hostility from my Catholic friends. And actually even from some of my friends who were inactive members of the Mormon Church had some challenging combats for both Paul and I. But most of the hostility came from friends who were not members of the Church and so I didn't want to be in that environment. But when I moved to Bloomington, it gave me time when I was suddenly the minority in something. I had been Catholic as a minority, believe it or not in that area that is a minority, and then suddenly when I was in Bloomington, Indiana and I started looking into the Church I realized, wow, it's very different outside of Utah. Very different. And they focus so much on the Doctrine of the Church and the beliefs and I was able to go to church and really concentrate on those things. I for the first time felt that I was getting knowledge about where I was from, where I was going, who I was. And one thing that had always inspired me, and my family growing up in Utah, was the intense focus on family in the church. On that sort of eternal family, forever. And being married and knowing we were going to start a family one day and everything, I was very interested in that. And the more I learned about it the more in sort of made sense to me and my life and the things that I planned on doing. And one thing that I didn't realize when I lived in Utah but did when I got out is how much the Church is focused on women, on women's education, on women being educated because that's always been a misunderstanding about the Church. You know, that women are barefoot and pregnant or whatever. And that's so opposite of what the doctrine of the Church is. It's very, you know, you go to school, you get educated, you learn, and the more educated you are the better person you are, the stronger person you are. And the higher the education, this is sort a little statistic on the side, but the higher the education the more active members seem to be in the Church. It's very interesting.

But I had just very strong beliefs and I knew even when I lived in Utah that I was going to be baptized and become a member of this church because it was the beliefs that I wanted to pursue. But I just, I guess, part fear and the hostilities from very close friends who, you know, I thought were friends and from some family members and things, that I thought, well, I need to wait. But I knew that I would join. So it took 2 years before I actually got the courage to go through with it. And maybe I needed that. I mean maybe that made me stronger. What was the follow up for that? Sort of my affiliation with the church?

DF: I think that was pretty much it. You said that the church in Bloomington was a lot different than in Utah. What about the one in Knox County?

LP: Oh, sure. Everywhere I have been a member of the church, wherever I have attended church, it has been what's called a ward. Which is a larger membership. There is a certain number... I think you have to average 120 members each Sunday and then you're sort of called a ward which

is like a parish. But smaller communities are called branches. So this is a branch of the church. And it's actually almost a ward because of the attendance. Which is really nice for everyone.

The difference here is that you can get to know everyone because there are so many fewer people. You also live much further away from people. So we have a program, I don't know if you know about it, called Visiting and Home Teaching. Where we are given the names of, for instance, I'm given the names of 3 other women in the branch and each month I visit them. And I take a spiritual lesson or if they need help, whether it be moving or they're having an emotional problem or physical problem making meals or whatever. Then I help them out with that through out the month, too. But they're sort of under our stewardship. So you really have to travel quite a ways to see these women. It takes much more commitment. And we all serve in callings, no one is paid in the church. It's all unpaid. So I serve as teacher. I was a counselor in the young women's program. Which was a lot of work. But now I'm a teacher in what's called the Relief Society, the women's organization. It's smaller so I get to know people better. It's much more distance so you have to be very committed. And sometimes it's challenging particularly for me. I grew up in a rural area. I don't know. I think my field of interest being in theater, I enjoy living in a large city, and I really look forward to moving back to that environment. So it gets challenging. We're all individuals in the church. I have certain beliefs that are not shared by people here because they're rural. You know guns laws and guns, animal rights, things like that which are not necessarily shared. So in that sense there are a lot of people within the branch that share a lot of those rural opinions and beliefs and things. Well, they're not even rural, they're just opinions and beliefs that I necessarily don't share. But I didn't notice that when I was in larger cities or wards. I just notice it here. So I know that sometimes I might say something, and I like put my hand over my mouth (as she covers her mouth). And, I say, "Oh, no! I probably shouldn't have just said that! I probably just offended someone and I didn't mean to." But people are so warm and kind and willing to do anything for you. It's amazing. We always have dinner invitations and everyone's always like, do you have somewhere to go for the holidays? If one or us, my husband or I, fly away, if we have something to do, they bring us over to dinner to make sure we have company and something to do.

Our activities together... we spend a lot of time together. My best friends that I have met here, my closest companions here, I met through the church here. A more down to earth feel. They're not so self-absorbed as you get sometimes in a larger area. So I think the branch really reflects both the good, and I don't want to say bad, but the challenging at least of the rural area socially. Does that make sense? Okay.

DF: Are there activities set up through the church, or does that just kind of happen on its own?

LP: Yeah. Actually I was in charge of the Christmas pageant this year. The pageant! It wasn't really a pageant it was a dinner and festivities. Yes they do. They have all kinds of programs. As you know the church sets out everything and it filters through... I mean the way we teach. It's all the standard book. Everyone who teaches the relief society, teaches the same lesson on the same day everywhere in the world. I mean it's always the same. We have a certain schedule and structure that's set out. And that way the doctrine, even though we all interpret the doctrine in certain ways, that way no one is interpreting... whatever. But there's organizations set up. The women's organization and the Relief Society--I don't know how much you know about it--but

it's the oldest women's organization in the world. And it was set up as a relief society, as a service. And the motto for the women's organization around the world is: Charity Never faith. And we do all kinds of things. Everyone was busily crochet special wraps for lepers to send out for leprosy victims. Also we make quilts for women's shelters, battered women's shelters or make emergency supplies. Because when they go into the shelters they have nothing usually. So toiletries and toys for kids and clothing and things like that. So the main priority and the main function of the relief society is to provide service. And so that is one of the... women take big responsibility in the service and teaching of the church. Most of the teachers in the church are women. So you're very busy. Organizations other than that. We have a young women's organization and a young men's organization. Once a month we all get together and hang out and we always do activities together. The young women's organization is wonderful because it especially for the young people here, as maybe only 2 of them are members of the church in their high school. Or most of their friends and the people they date, they don't have a wide selection of men in their own religion, of boys in their own religion to date. And we do encourage that just of course, I think all religions do pretty much. So we teach a set of values which is universal for all young women's organizations around the world. They include integrity, self-worth, choice and accountability, knowledge--and that includes the whole scope of that--faith, divine nature. We teach that women have a divine nature and that it's up to you to find that. And that helps with their self-esteem and their self-worth. We find that the young women who really learn those sort of mottos and really learn those standards and that if they apply them, which most of them are pretty good about doing, it's amazing how they become very confident and they're good students and they make good choices in that way. So that's another organization. The men of course have different organizations within the church. That have to do with the priesthood, holding a priesthood. It's different than you might find in Catholicism in that many of the men in the church hold the priesthood. Even my husband was, so that he could do blessings. He baptized me, so that was exciting, too.

What else is there? And there's of course children's organizations, called Primary. That's like a Sunday school for little ones. We have lots of activities together. Particularly here, they're very actively involved. Even Halloween night to keep kids from getting into too much trouble. There's a wonderful couple who lives way out, you know as I refer to as the boondocks, way out there. And they have a farm. And they start this huge bonfire and they get this tractor out and they have hayrides. And so you're going all over through the fields. And that's something I've never experienced before. Even when I grew up in a small town, 'cause I grew up in a house, not a farm. And it's wonderful. All the kids come out, all the adults, and we're all together. So there's a lot of socializing together, although lots of members have friends outside. There's a lot of activities and organizations together. I talk forever, sorry.

DF: No, it's great. Especially to hear all of the stuff about the women. Do you want to ask a question?

AK: Yeah. Well, one of the things that we were really interested in is the super high rate of conversion. If you have any personal theories on that.

LP: Some personal theories... Um, I do. I have a couple. I'm not a doom and gloom person I know that... You know it's real funny because in Utah you never here, growing up in the West... Actually, did either of you grow up in the West?

DF: No, Chicago.

LP: Okay, growing up in the West you do not have these Christian stations that come on. Or the bible belt. There's not this, you know, different church on every corner. It's very different in that sense. You have your Catholic church, your Presbyterian church, and your Mormon church, and that's through out the West mostly. What I have noticed, like I've said I'm not a doom and gloom about you know, Y2K is going to kill us all or anything like that, I do believe though that people sense a need for companionship and community. And I do bees living eternally together once they're sealed in the temples. You may know some statistics about the church as well. As far as the divorce rate being much lower, abuse rates being much lower because we have standards called A Word of Wisdom which are dietary laws. We do not drink--do you know those? I don't know if you know those. Yeah, we don't smoke, we don't do any sort of drugs. We don't drink coffee or tea. Some people are vegetarians, but very little meat. The main staple of the diet is of course wheat and so forth. And only in times of famine would you partake in meat or in, but you know that's sometimes interpreted differently either to one extreme or the other.

I believe that, obviously I believe in the church, I'm a member of it. Because I feel very strongly that the beliefs that I have are truths and I think that sort of spirit is evoked amongst people when they get to learn, really read the scriptures and when they pray about it because you get a lot of people who know a lot about the church and they read a lot and they're scholars and so forth. And even, that's how my father had raised us. But until I began to pray about it and read about it as it applies to you personally then that's when you start to gain a testimony.

We also have a lot of missionaries and the missionaries, I think it's--I hate to use the word impressive because it sounds cocky or elitist and I don't mean that at all--but I think it's pretty amazing often times to people to see 19-year-old guys who quit college, sell everything they have to raise enough money to go for 2 years somewhere, who knows in the world. Sometimes they go to 3rd-world countries, sometimes they come to, you know, Mount Vernon, Ohio. Sometimes they go to Chicago or L.A. or whatever. And they learn a language, sometimes they already know it. Often times they do. And they live these lives that are so clean and they're strong and they're happy. And the same with the women missionaries. Women missionaries are usually 20-, 21-years-old. And they devote 2 years of their lives. And it's all to service, it's all to service projects. And I think that they have such a strong sense of spirit and such a strong sense of spirituality, I know that word gets handed around a lot. But also, such a commitment and direction in their lives. That would be my, in very long form, my personal opinion. I don't know, I believe it's true. I think people see that when there's a need. But they're directly inspired because of challenges and difficulties they see in the world right now. No one wants to take in their elderly parents and care for them. They used to be caring for the generations. There's just not that anymore. Instead of a T.V. there used to be a story teller in the corner who was the grandma or the grandpa or whatever. And that doesn't exist anymore. And so they look for that. And in the church you can find that.

AK: Do you think there's anything special about Knox County, why people would convert within the county?

LP: Within the county? Okay, I'm sorry. Were you talking about the county?

AK: No, I'm asking a different question.

LP: Oh, okay. Well, maybe. I think so because once again there's such a commitment to be a member of the church. And we see sacrifice as a good thing. I mean it's a sacred offering, literally. We strongly feel, or I shouldn't say we. I think the Church strongly feels a desire to share, I mean members of the church feel very strongly to share the rewards of that commitment. And blessings and most of the people, I think, who convert here have those same needs that I was talking about earlier. In a rural environment there's a lot of needs. Maybe different. We see a really interesting scope of people. I have seen, since the time I have been here. I have seen people baptized who have literally nothing, nothing. I mean, as far as their temporal welfare. They're very poor. Spiritually they've had, oh man, so many obstacles. I've met a couple of people who have mental illness that they have overcome and they are well know. But they have overcome that through really good--medication and doctors and all that--through the years where they've had all kinds of stuff. And then I've seen people who come from really well brought up, stable family, life, homes, happy--you know, I'm giving 2 extremes. They have great jobs, no temporal concerns at all, but again they're seeking spiritual, they're seeking truth, they're seeking a belief that has those values that they want so much. So I don't know. Probably the same reasons. I don't see a difference thinking about the people in 2 areas.

I think sometimes there's a challenge because we have a really good welfare program. I don't know how aware you are of the welfare program that the church instigates. It's massive scale. And the government has even studied it for potential use as a standard for the United States. It's a wonderful program. And the interesting thing, I think from time to time there are people who think: Oh, wow, they'll get me food, clothing, take care of me and stuff. If they gain in on that welfare program. But the interesting thing is that once you receive that you are sort of obligated. But you want to, you're not just obligated. But spiritually and emotionally you want to return that. So, although I haven't ever received from the welfare program I go down to the cannery and fill baskets full of groceries for people to give them for their needs. Canning, we can for people. We clean for people, stuff like that.

AK: Now, when you do that is that for people all over the place or is it just within the community?

LP: Well, we work for people within the community. Although when we go down to do that it's usually for people within the region. We also do work for people only in Knox County. And we never know who it is we're doing it for. It's very private and confidential. They just say we have family that has this kind of need, will you help us with this? Sometimes we put together things on a world-wide scale. For instance if there's a big national disaster somewhere. South America or wherever. We will collect things and put them with a major donation which is central in Utah and then they ship it out.

But like I said earlier. The Relief Society, the women's organization, is really in charge of doing that kind of welfare work and community service for those in the community. It extends beyond just members of the church, too. It extends to just those in need. We never, you know... No! It's whoever is in need.

AK: You're answering so many of these along the way. What do you see as the most important parts of the religion. For you what's kind of the central?

LP: The central part of the religion? Probably the fact that we believe in a living prophet. Which means that we believe that there is someone on this earth at this time that is leading guiding through divine revelation. We believe that there's a, universal truths don't change according to the whim of people. We always know that killing someone is bad. These are just basic truths. These are things that don't change. But the way the we have to live with one another and deal with one another can change. So having a living prophet allows us to always know that we are guided, that we are on the right path, we're doing the things we're supposed to do.

(Side B of tape 1)

LP: So a living prophet, leading and guiding us is very important. I think it's important to have that sort of leadership, guiding us and making sure we're maintaining the truths. It's easy... you know you hear about all of these sects. You hear about splinter off of this group or this group. And one religion can end up being so many. But there is one church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, there is a small sect called the reform.

AK: I've heard about that.

LP: That happened a long time ago, sort of very early on in the church. That's an interesting historical--something you should look at. But that's really it. But this maintains truths and interpretation of scripture. Because if some one person starts interpreting it as scripture then they try to teach it and so forth. That's a long, complicated thing. The other thing that is very important to me is the life style of the Church. I, in the concept of prayer, I have been through some very challenging times. Even since I've been a member of the Church with different things. Whether they be medical or family issues. And I always know, *I always know*, that wherever I go, there will be a church. And I know the meeting will be the same. And I will meet people that will accept me immediately and care for me as I needed it. I always know that I can go in prayer and have. I mean I pray about teaching every day. You know make sure that I can teach what I'm supposed to teach, that I'm clear, that they understand, they can do their work. My papers, my students, myself. And I haven't had a problem with them. That's something I share with my colleagues, or even my students. You know, I'm sharing that with you now. But I pray about performances and my ability to do the work I need to do. And I always know that I'm going to be okay. And that's one thing I know within the church. That prayer is such an important facet of the religion. With Jesus Christ it is the cornerstone, you know, and you can always go throw him. You have my father, and pray about anything. The answer may not be what you want to hear, but you will receive an answer if it's earnest and if it's truthful.

And of course, like I said, the lifestyle. Which leads to that. Always keeping your body clean. No foreign substances in your body. No adultery or fornication or anything like that. Or out of marriage. Just keeping what you watch clean, what you think about, what you do, the music you listen to. Making sure that that's clean. But your diet. Keeping yourself clean of all substances. Nothing that can possibly... not even caffeine. Well, although. That is not a doctrine. "No Caffeine" is not a doctrine of the Church, just so you know. But most, or many members of the church do not partake of caffeine because it's considered a drug-like substance. But that doesn't mean it's a doctrine that's just in the interpretation. Again, like some people are vegetarians because of the word of wisdom about meat. Others are not. I'm not. I eat chicken, I eat fish. I don't eat a lot, but I do eat it. My husband drinks Coke. I don't, I just don't like caffeine. But even over the counter drugs are limited. And of course, no illegal drugs, no smoking, nothing that can damage, hinder or anything in your body. Keeping active, exercising. Even though, you know, I wish I could be more healthy, and so forth. Just keeping a healthy life-style. Both physically and mentally and of course, spiritually.

So I think those 2 are the main things, or 3--prayer, lifestyle, and the prophet.

AK: When you say a living prophet, does that mean the President?

LP: Yes, that means President Hinkley, Gordon B. Hinkley who is also called a prophet, seer, and revelator. So he has several titles. And the president of the church just simply designates the organization. But really what we always refer to him is--the prophet. But seer and revelator kind of go under that umbrella of prophet. We believe very strongly that he can go into the temple and pray for revelation. While prophet, not while he's not a prophet. A lot of people think, oh, if President Hinkley said something 50 years ago then it's, you know, doctrine. And that's not true. You have to be the prophet. It can't be before you're the prophet. You have to be the prophet. And then you can receive revelation. For instance, President Kimball received revelation about changing the--and this is really a sort of hot topic, for anti-Latter Day Saint people. But about ordaining Blacks, African Americans, into the priesthood. And that was back in the 70s. There are a number of reasons. So it might be something that it just comes at the right time. It comes at the time when it's supposed to happen. The words that they speak when they just talk to us as prophets are guidance and council that we believe is inspired by heavenly father. So if he says the church really needs to focus... on these members of the church really need to focus on reading the Book of Mormon more then we believe that very heavily. And suddenly you'll see the whole lesson plan for Sunday School and so forth change, for Gospel Doctrine's class, change to really focus more. If we're in a time of need we know that he would be there to do that.

AK: Kimball, just because I don't know and I should. There was that issue about Blacks being ordained into the ministry then there was also that one about polygamy I think, right?

LP: Well, yeah, that was a *long* time ago. That was the end of the last century. That was. I can't be completely sure of the accurate, so I will tell you what I can tell you. There was an incredible persecution up on the church of members. I mean there was tar and featherings and mob beatings and murders and rapes and all kinds of stuff that went on because of intolerance for the Church, the religion itself. There was a sort of an extermination order out on members of the church.

And even the U.S. government was sent out to Utah, or cavalry out to Utah to do some pretty nasty stuff.. And so because polygamy which was practiced by some members of the Church was from my understanding illegal in the U.S. government, although I don't know that there was a law at that time against it. But it was considered, by verbal word illegal. So the Church immediately banned that from practice. I think there may have been members who practiced it. But anyone who did was excommunicated. And there was no more multiple marriages allowed through the temple or anything. And that's a part of the church history. I mean, everyone has that church history. And if you had looked at it through the eyes of people then it would have a very different meaning then it does to us. And it's real interesting because a lot of other Christians will focus on that in our history. When in fact, they don't focus on the fact that many figures in the bible, the Old Testament, were polygamists. So there is that sort of interesting sense there. But it's a part of history. And there were also some practical reasons which I understand. Which was like during the wagon trains going across the plains many women lost their husbands and their entire families or they had still all their children and lost their husbands. And at that time, you know, women didn't work. In the mid-1800s there was a certain stigma on women. And so they were taken into these homes as the wives of men who had wives. And so there are some other reasons for it as well. And they were given homes and families and they were cared for completely and loved. I mean I can't say that those weren't some questions that I had in my mind when I joined the church. You know, what was the history of that. But one thing I have learned is that when it comes to revelations about you know, why weren't Blacks in the priesthood, why weren't they able to be ordained, why did polygamy happen? Those things that are really hard for us to accept in our day and age I know that those will either be rebilled? to me in time or I know that when I die and pass through what we call the Veil into the next life, I know that all those things will all be rebuilt? to me. That's fine with me. Yes, sometimes it comes up and I'm reminded and I'm like, hmmm, and I read about it and want to learn about it, but if I can't answer that question I know that I will accept getting an answer later. Because I know the answer will come. If I have questions. So, it's a perspective. Yeah, these are some hot topics.

Actually if you were interested in reading further about that President Hinkley gave a talk at our last conference. We have two a year, our last general conference, he have talk. Which goes through very challenging questions that we get asked a lot. And those 2 are in there. And he says this is the churches belief on that. Anyone today who is caught practicing any sort of polygamy is immediately excommunicated and they are of course legally bound to deal with the choice they make. They deal with the legal consequences and also the moral because they are excommunicated. But also that talk was about other tough issues like homosexuality, abortion, things like that.

AK: I'd love to see that.

LP: Really? Okay, great. I'll find that for you and get that to you. It's a great talk. It gives real quick paragraphs about it. But they're just really nice ways to answer tough questions.

AK: Now in terms of--and you touched on this a little just now, I mean you said a couple things about it in the beginning--but in terms of people's perceptions of the church. I mean, could you

just speak a little about that and especially how it is in Knox County.

LP: Absolutely. There is a lot of problems. I mean, if you go to Temple Square, in Salt Lake City they're not allowed on the property. Because it's private property, it's church owned property. The sidewalk outside of Temple Square, outside the gates, there's this wall of people. They're always handing out these anti- pamphlets and things like that. And I've always thought it was said, even when I was Catholic and not a member of the church. And my father who is a very strong Catholic also really abhors anyone getting so involved in an anti- cause like that. You know, against, you know they're not causing any problems. If there's no one causing any problems than find something else to do besides be anti- something or whatever. And certainly violent means of that is just not acceptable. But, so world-wide there are challenges because there are differences in the way we live our life. It is not always acceptable to not...when someone says do you want coffee and you say no. Tea? No. Pop? No. Cigarette? No. Alcohol? No. I mean, and they're wondering, well what's up with you? And so the lifestyle is different. The fact that even though the children and the youth are strong and marriages don't end in divorce, for the most part, there are some. That sometimes that's all seen as a negative thing. Something must be wrong, they're brainwashed or something.

I Knox County challenges come in the form of usually, from what I understand from other members of the Church. Most of the challenges come at work. I have even had a colleague confront me very angrily about my choice of my beliefs. And that was surprising for me coming from an educated person who's supposed to be. You know, you'd normally like to think that educated people are a little more tolerant and private. Especially when it doesn't effect--I don't talk about it at work or anything. But the same things happen to many members and youth, they get confronted a lot at school. And most of the questions come about basic things like the Blacks and polygamy. Anytime someone learns something about the Church, those are the first 2 questions that come up. It's like, okay, let's get past those. Let me hurry and answer those and then we'll get to the religion. But also, in Knox County, because there's such a wide variety of churches I will say that even though I have heard some horrendous comments made about the Amish people from people who live here, and I'm very saddened to hear that because Because I haven't had the confrontation here, I haven't had people confront me here about my beliefs and the church near what I've experienced in Cincinnati or even especially in Salt Lake in Utah I would see some amazing confrontations there. I was like, wow. People who weren't Mormon and moved to Utah are very, they jump on the anti- bandwagon. So it's much more tolerant here in Knox County, much more. And people kind of stick to themselves. It's kind of rural. They go home, and they live far apart, then they cook or whatever. We'll go to our church, you go to yours. And maybe some of it's apathy, but I think they're just more laid back, more calm.

AK: That's interesting. And you think their number 1 and 2 misconceptions are probably (a) Blacks and (b) polygamy?

LP: Yeah, I mean those are the first two things that come up. Misconceptions that also we're some sort of brainwashed cult and that we're not Christian. And that's so amazing to me. And I heard that all the time growing up. Oh, Mormons aren't Christian from, not members of my family, but people who were nonmembers around us and other Catholics and so forth. And the

funny thing is, is that it's the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the cornerstone of the whole religion is Jesus Christ. And the revelations of a few of the prophets have been from Jesus Christ. The temple ceremonies which are very sacred, so we don't discuss them outside of the temple, not even between husband and wife do we discuss them outside of the temple, they all are surrounded and they all have to do with Jesus Christ. So, that's the other misconception. And I think that's because they think, oh, you don't have the trinity. And it's like well, no, we have the Holy Ghost, Jesus Christ, and Heavenly Father but we see them as separate rather than one.

AK: You said that generally you don't talk about your religion to much around here, is it something that you'd like...?

LP: Oh, sure. Well, when I am approached, I'm a little different I suppose in the workplace just because my field, the arts--I'll say this very frankly. Most people in the theater usually don't belong to, or actively belong to a religion. And they're not active in it. I find that I prefer not to bring it up in the workplace, I know that sometimes legally you're not supposed to. But if I am asked about it, I certainly will. Most of the time when people try to approach me in the workplace, the experiences that I've had, is with hostility. And so that's just not acceptable for the work environment. So I say, usually my response is or has been upon several occasions, um I'd love to discuss this sometime after work. You know, if you'd like to get together for dinner or whatever. And as much as I'd love to be able to share it. So what I do believe is the example you can set, and this sounds really fundamental, basic stuff. But if you're a good person and you share what we call the light of Christ, which you can read that in Mathew in the New Testament. If you carry the light of Christ and you make your decisions based on prayer, consultation with Heavenly Father, and if you're decisions are right and you live your life well and you'r good to people and you're charitable and you offer service, they ask, and I have so many people ask questions sometimes. And the other problem with that is that they watch you very closely so on a bad day, if you get angry, and you say something they notice that. They're like: "I never expected to hear that from you." So it puts you on the spot. So you do have to be an example all the time and it's really good for you to do that because it reminds you. But no, I don't talk about it at work too much. Most people find out very quickly or they ask you. As soon as I tell them I'm from Utah: "Are you Mormon?"

AK: How do you feel about the term "Mormon?"

LP: I don't like to use it in terms of--I do have some problems with it because anti-Mormons use that in all of their work. The name of the church is the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints because Jesus Christ is the center of the church. And that's why it's so important. We try not to use LDS either. Latter Day Saint we use from time to time. And it is really hard to say that all the time because it's so long. Mormon was a prophet and so I think by titling your church, "Mormon," you're setting yourself up for that being the center of your belief. Just like Baptists or setting that central belief, Baptism and so forth. So their Baptists. And scary cults take on the name of whoever like Divitian and that's not right. So if you're going to take on the name of your church you should take on the full proper name. Again, Mormon was a prophet. A good prophet. And the book of Mormon you'll notice in the last 10 years they've added another

testament of Jesus Christ. So the people realize it's not about Mormon, it's about Jesus Christ. Names of choirs have been changed recently. We have the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. But instead of the Mormon Youth Choir, it's now called the Temple Square Youth Choir, or something like that. So taking Mormon out of that phrasing as much as possible and bringing in Jesus Christ or bring in other terms that don't carry that sort of stigma. So, I do have some problems even though I slip into it sometimes. I'm the first one to say I'm a member of The Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints, I'm Mormon! And some people are like, oh. But people know that name now. The prophet has been on so many TV shows lately just because he's more of a public person and there's been so much confusion. And the church is growing so fast.

AK: Do you think the community of the Church here is isolated in any way?

LP: No, there are so many different people. There's farmers who are really, really rural within the Church. And there are people that are very involved in the community. They work for the city and so forth. And since we are such a people church, in the way that a lot of us service the community, we're very community oriented. I don't feel like we're isolated. I think our way of living is often isolated even here in Knox County. So many people smoke here. It's amazing to me. The standard of living not materialistically, but sort of morally within the branch here is slightly--I don't want to say higher because again it gives that elitist quality--but it's a little cleaner physically and physiologically. And the choices and so forth. I think to some extent there's some isolation in realizing that, okay, we're different. We've got to send our kids away to find someone to marry or to date or whatever that's within the church. And they of course have no problem doing that, locating that. But, no, I think there's so much community service that we're not at all isolated. When I was a counselor in the Young Women's, we were doing community service all the time. So lots of service projects, working with the community. No isolation. Everyone's involved with something outside of the church.

AK: What I really forgot to ask you, well you kind of answered it. How would you characterize the church community here and do you really feel like it's a strong community.

LP: Yes it's so small here, it is really a strong community. And one of the things that make it very strong here, at the branch. Well, there's a couple of reasons. One is, it is so small that everyone knows each other and you uplift each other. And if someone's not at church, everyone notices. Everyone notices because a family of 6 kids, if they're not on that first row, we notice that one of the pews is empty. You know, are you okay? Is everything okay?

The other is that as a branch in Mount Vernon, we are very isolated from other churches. Like I think the next closest Mormon Church is in Delaware. And all the stake meetings happen down in Columbus. So, we can't just hop up down there and hang out with them because some people don't even have cars. So there's the sense that we do have to spend a lot of time together away from other members of the church because of the sheer, physical distance. I think characterizing them as a very close-knit group, but very happy. It's really funny. One of the things we try to do is at the sacrament meeting--which is the meeting where we partake of the sacrament and we have talks and so forth. Normally they're very reverent and very quiet and

very sacred, as they should be. And the talks are often very formal. But here, very casual. People walk in and they start talking. Even though the organ is playing, and that's like a hint to, shhhh, be quiet so we can be reverenced and contimplait why we're here, to partake in the sacrament which is sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It's very talkative. The talks that are given are often very casual and informal. Just because the people are. So it just makes people seem even more friendly. And sometimes I get frustrated with that. One, because I was raised in Catholicism which is very formal and very strict and so forth. And then also I've been in wards, mostly in larger cities, where everyone is very quiet and reverent. So it is different in that way. But, like I said, sometimes it's frustrating, but I like it a lot because everyone knows me and they're interested and it's a good knowing. And they're like, "how are you doing?" And I'm like, "how are you?" And you can't wait to see people. So you never want to miss church because everyone's your friend and it's so tight. People travel a long way to go to church here, too. They travel many miles. And I have one woman who walks with her 2 little kids. Miles and miles and miles to church every Sunday. We try and always give rides. But sometimes people don't like to ask. So that's how I'd characterize it. As very loving and very close.

Tape 2

AK: As a continuation of the last question, I wanted to ask you if you could talk about... You mentioned socio-economic diversity. There's tons of that within the community. In terms of ethnic and racial.

LP: I will be the first to admit that racially there is not a great deal of diversity. I came from a ward in Cincinnati which was almost half African American. Almost half. And it was wonderful to hear testimonies. The stories and just meeting with them. My husband used to home teach a man who was Creole. So he was very, very dark but he had these striking blue eyes and he was very old. And he had been in prison for years and years and years. He had been wrongly imprisoned, mostly because he was Black. But he had actually in self defense ended up killing an intruder in the home who was attacking his mother. So he was in prison for a long time, and like I said it was wrongly accused and so forth. So that sort of amazing stories and the relationships you get from someone and the characters and their *testimonies* of how they've been helped and so forth by their beliefs. It's just amazing.

So, yes, there is definitely a lack of that. There's diversity in education here. There's a lot of people in the branch that have above a college degree, like a doctorate or what have you, and there's those that didn't even finish high school. So there's diversity in that way so you get a lot of humility and a little arogance here and there. But it also adds for some great lively debates.

Ethnically, backgrounds, not a whole lot. Those who have been members most of their lives are usually they come from strong traditions of either Scandanavian, European descent. Those who are converts from around here. Many of them are either Apalachian or Southern who've moved up here. Lots of West Virginians. And that's just because Knox County has so many West Virginians here. Huge influx, back I think it was after World War II. So the diversity comes more, yeah, socioeconomic and it's not racial or ethnic diversity a great deal.

In Utah there's an incredible amount of diversity. A lot of African Americans, a lot of Polynisian and Asian peoples. So an incredible amount of diversity. And as you may know

there's more members of this church outside of the United States than there is inside the United States. And a lot of those are in South African, South American, Australia, and of course Europe. And now we have missionaries in Russia, so northern European and eastern European areas. So, Knox County is pretty traditional. Lots of farmers and hunters and agricultural type people.

Now, this is interesting though. You know how sometimes city folk try to infaltrate the rural area? There tends to be a real influx in that. And I know that I have seen problems with that. In Utah we had some serious problems with that. With Californias. Montana had some serious problems with very wealthy celebraties buying up towns. So people who grew up in small towns can't even afford to live there anymore. That sort of thing, I could see that sort of thing happening in Knox County. And in the Church already there's many members of the church who simply moved to Knox County, they still commute to Columbus to work in a field of business usually. But they wanted to live in a safe, quiet, rural community. And they chose Knox County, Mount Vernon particularly, but Knox County. And because of their jobs, compared to the jobs of those who live around here, they make a lot more money, their cars--you know at church, you can park a really nice car next to an old truck covered with manuer easily. They have a lot more financial stability, homes are bigger, things like that. So even though there's a real non-focus on materialism within the church, you can still see that diversity. Just because of the infaltration of Columbus.

AK: Do you think there's going to be more of that?

LP: I do. And I think there will be more of that all over Knox County. Not just within the Church. But I see a lot of that. A lot of members of this church... We have a real focus on preparation. We should all have a year supply of food and fuel and that so we can sustain ourselves for a year without any outside challenges or anything. I can't. I'm not very good at that. Mostly because I live in an apartment and I don't have the room for a whole year's supply of that. And I'm not going to supply fuel in an apartment.